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# YOUTH: A NARRATIVE

BY

JOSEPH CONRAD

*NOTES AND STUDY HELPS*

By ETHEL M. SEALEY

*Head of Department of English,  
Harbord Collegiate Institute, Toronto*

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# YOUTH.

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THIS could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea interpenetrate, so to speak—the sea entering into the life of most men, and the men knowing something or everything about the sea, in the way of amusement, of travel, or of bread-winning.

We were sitting round a mahogany table that reflected the bottle, the claret-glasses, and our faces as we leaned on our elbows. There was a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer, Marlow, and myself. The director had been a *Conway* boy, the accountant had served four years at sea, the lawyer—a fine crusted Tory, High Churchman, the best of old fellows, the soul of honour—had been chief officer in the P. & O. service in the good old days when mail-boats were square-rigged at least on two masts, and used to come down the China Sea before a fair monsoon with stun'-sails set alow and aloft. We all began life in the merchant service. Between the five of us there was the strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft, which no amount of enthusiasm for yachting, cruising, and so on can give,

since one is only the amusement of life and the other is life itself.

Marlow (at least I think that is how he spelt his name) told the story, or rather the chronicle, of a voyage:—

“Yes, I have seen a little of the Eastern seas ; but what I remember best is my first voyage there. You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something—and you can’t. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little—not a thing in the world—not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination.

“It was altogether a memorable affair. It was my first voyage to the East, and my first voyage as second mate; it was also my skipper’s first command. You’ll admit it was time. He was sixty if a day; a little man, with a broad, not very straight back, with bowed shoulders and one leg more bandy than the other, he had that queer twisted-about appearance you see so often in men who work in the fields. He had a nut-cracker face—chin and nose trying to come together over a sunken mouth—and it was framed in iron-grey fluffy hair, that looked like a chin-strap of cotton-wool sprinkled with coal-dust. And he had blue eyes in that old face of his, which were amazingly like a boy’s, with that candid expression some quite common men preserve to the end of their days by a rare internal gift of simplicity of heart and rectitude of soul. What induced him



to accept me was a wonder. I had come out of a crack Australian clipper, where I had been third officer, and he seemed to have a prejudice against crack clippers as aristocratic and high-toned. He said to me, 'You know, in this ship you will have to work.' I said I had to work in every ship I had ever been in. 'Ah, but this is different, and you gentlemen out of them big ships ; . . . but there ! I daresay you will do. Join to-morrow.'

"I joined to-morrow. It was twenty-two years ago ; and I was just twenty. How time passes ! It was one of the happiest days of my life. Fancy ! Second mate for the first time—a really responsible officer ! I wouldn't have thrown up my new billet for a fortune. The mate looked me over carefully. He was also an old chap, but of another stamp. He had a Roman nose, a snow-white, long beard, and his name was Mahon, but he insisted that it should be pronounced Mann. He was well connected ; yet there was something wrong with his luck, and he had never got on.

"As to the captain, he had been for years in coasters, then in the Mediterranean, and last in the West Indian trade. He had never been round the Capes. He could just write a kind of sketchy hand, and didn't care for writing at all. Both were thorough good seamen of course, and between those two old chaps I felt like a small boy between two grandfathers.

"The ship also was old. Her name was the *Judea*. Queer name, isn't it ? She belonged to a man Wilmer, Wilcox—some name like that ; but he has been bankrupt and dead these twenty years or more,

and his name don't matter. She had been laid up in Shadwell basin for ever so long. You may imagine her state. She was all rust, dust, grime—soot aloft, dirt on deck. To me it was like coming out of a palace into a ruined cottage. She was about 400 tons, had a primitive windlass, wooden latches to the doors, not a bit of brass about her, and a big square stern. There was on it, below her name in big letters, a lot of scrollwork, with the gilt off, and some sort of a coat of arms, with the motto 'Do or Die' underneath. I remember it took my fancy immensely. There was a touch of romance in it, something that made me love the old thing—something that appealed to my youth !

"We left London in ballast—sand ballast—to load a cargo of coal in a northern port for Bangkok. Bangkok ! I thrilled. I had been six years at sea, but had only seen Melbourne and Sydney, very good places, charming places in their way—but Bangkok !

"We worked out of the Thames under canvas, with a North Sea pilot on board. His name was Jermyn, and he dodged all day long about the galley drying his handkerchief before the stove. Apparently he never slept. He was a dismal man, with a perpetual tear sparkling at the end of his nose, who either had been in trouble, or was in trouble, or expected to be in trouble—couldn't be happy unless something went wrong. He mistrusted my youth, my common-sense, and my seamanship, and made a point of showing it in a hundred little ways. I daresay he was right. It seems to me I knew very little then, and I know not much more now ; but I cherish a hate for that Jermyn to this day.

“We were a week working up as far as Yarmouth Roads, and then we got into a gale—the famous October gale of twenty-two years ago. It was wind, lightning, sleet, snow, and a terrific sea. We were flying light, and you may imagine how bad it was when I tell you we had smashed bulwarks and a flooded deck. On the second night she shifted her ballast into the lee bow, and by that time we had been blown off somewhere on the Dogger Bank. There was nothing for it but go below with shovels and try to right her, and there we were in that vast hold, gloomy like a cavern, the tallow dips stuck and flickering on the beams, the gale howling above, the ship tossing about like mad on her side ; there we all were, Jermyn, the captain, everyone, hardly able to keep our feet, engaged on that gravedigger’s work, and trying to toss shovelfuls of wet sand up to windward. At every tumble of the ship you could see vaguely in the dim light men falling down with a great flourish of shovels. One of the ship’s boys (we had two), impressed by the weirdness of the scene, wept as if his heart would break. We could hear him blubbering somewhere in the shadows.

“On the third day the gale died out, and by-and-by a north-country tug picked us up. We took sixteen days in all to get from London to the Tyne ! When we got into dock we had lost our turn for loading, and they hauled us off to a tier where we remained for a month. Mrs. Beard (the captain’s name was Beard) came from Colchester to see the old man. She lived on board. The crew of runners had left, and there remained only the officers, one boy, and the steward, a mulatto who answered to the name of

Abraham. Mrs. Beard was an old woman, with a face all wrinkled and ruddy like a winter apple, and the figure of a young girl. She caught sight of me once, sewing on a button, and insisted on having my shirts to repair. This was something different from the captains' wives I had known on board crack clippers. When I brought her the shirts, she said: 'And the socks? They want mending, I am sure, and John's—Captain Beard's—things are all in order now. I would be glad of something to do.' Bless the old woman. She overhauled my outfit for me, and meantime I read for the first time 'Sartor Resartus' and Burnaby's 'Ride to Khiva.' I didn't understand much of the first then; but I remember I preferred the soldier to the philosopher at the time; a preference which life has only confirmed. One was a man, and the other was either more—or less. However, they are both dead, and Mrs. Beard is dead, and youth, strength, genius, thoughts, achievements, simple hearts—all dies. . . . No matter.

"They loaded us at last. We shipped a crew. Eight able-seamen and two boys. We hauled off one evening to the buoys at the dock-gates, ready to go out, and with a fair prospect of beginning the voyage next day. Mrs. Beard was to start for home by a late train. When the ship was fast we went to tea. We sat rather silent through the meal—Mahon, the old couple, and I. I finished first, and slipped away for a smoke, my cabin being in a deck-house just against the poop. It was high water, blowing fresh with a drizzle; the double dock-gates were opened, and the steam-colliers were going in and out

in the darkness with their lights burning bright, a great splashing of propellers, rattling of winches, and a lot of hailing on the pier-heads. I watched the procession of head-lights gliding high and of green lights gliding low in the night, when suddenly a red gleam flashed at me, vanished, came into view again, and remained. The fore-end of a steamer loomed up close. I shouted down the cabin, 'Come up, quick!' and then heard a startled voice saying afar in the dark, 'Stop her, sir.' A bell jingled. Another voice cried warningly, 'We are going right into that barque, sir.' The answer to this was a gruff 'All right,' and the next thing was a heavy crash as the steamer struck a glancing blow with the bluff of her bow about our fore-rigging. There was a moment of confusion, yelling, and running about. Steam roared. Then somebody was heard saying, 'All clear, sir.' . . . 'Are you all right?' asked the gruff voice. I had jumped forward to see the damage, and hailed back, 'I think so.' 'Easy astern,' said the gruff voice. A bell jingled. 'What steamer is that?' screamed Mahon. By that time she was no more to us than a bulky shadow manoeuvring a little way off. They shouted at us some name—a woman's name, Miranda or Melissa—or some such thing. 'This means another month in this beastly hole,' said Mahon to me, as we peered with lamps about the splintered bulwarks and broken braces. 'But where's the captain?'

"We had not heard or seen anything of him all that time. We went aft to look. A doleful voice arose hailing somewhere in the middle of the dock, '*Judea* ahoy!' . . . How the devil did he get

there ? . . . 'Hallo !' we shouted. 'I am adrift in our boat without oars,' he cried. A belated waterman offered his services, and Mahon struck a bargain with him for half-a-crown to tow our skipper alongside ; but it was Mrs. Beard that came up the ladder first. They had been floating about the dock in that mizzly cold rain for nearly an hour. I was never so surprised in my life.

"It appears that when he heard my shout 'Come up' he understood at once what was the matter, caught up his wife, ran on deck, and across, and down into our boat, which was fast to the ladder. Not bad for a sixty-year-old. Just imagine that old fellow saving heroically in his arms that old woman—the woman of his life. He set her down on a thwart, and was ready to climb back on board when the painter came adrift somehow, and away they went together. Of course in the confusion we did not hear him shouting. He looked abashed. She said cheerfully, 'I suppose it does not matter my losing the train now?' 'No, Jenny—you go below and get warm,' he growled. Then to us : 'A sailor has no business with a wife—I say. There I was, out of the ship. Well, no harm done this time. Let's go and look at what that fool of a steamer smashed.'

"It wasn't much, but it delayed us three weeks. At the end of that time, the captain being engaged with his agents, I carried Mrs. Beard's bag to the railway station and put her all comfy into a third-class carriage. She lowered the window to say, 'You are a good young man. If you see John—Captain Beard—without his muffler at night, just remind him from me to keep his throat well wrapped

up.' 'Certainly, Mrs Beard,' I said. 'You are a good young man ; I noticed how attentive you are to John—to Captain——' The train pulled out suddenly ; I took my cap off to the old woman : I never saw her again. . . . Pass the bottle.

"We went to sea next day. When we made that start for Bangkok we had been already three months out of London. We had expected to be a fortnight or so—at the outside.

"It was January, and the weather was beautiful—the beautiful sunny winter weather that has more charm than in the summer-time, because it is unexpected, and crisp, and you know it won't, it can't, last long. It's like a windfall, like a godsend, like an unexpected piece of luck.

"It lasted all down the North Sea, all down Channel ; and it lasted till we were three hundred miles or so to the westward of the Lizards : then the wind went round to the sou'west and began to pipe up. In two days it blew a gale. The *Judea*, hove-to, wallowed on the Atlantic like an old candle-box. It blew day after day : it blew with spite, without interval, without mercy, without rest. The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves rushing at us, under a sky low enough to touch with the hand and dirty like a smoked ceiling. In the stormy space surrounding us there was as much flying spray as air. Day after day and night after night there was nothing round the ship but the howl of the wind, the tumult of the sea, the noise of water pouring over her deck. There was no rest for her and no rest for us. She tossed, she pitched, she stood on her head, she sat on her tail, she rolled,



she groaned, and we had to hold on while on deck and cling to our bunks when below, in a constant effort of body and worry of mind.

"One night Mahon spoke through the small window of my berth. It opened right into my very bed, and I was lying there sleepless, in my boots, feeling as though I had not slept for years, and could not if I tried. He said excitedly—

"‘You got the sounding-rod in here, Marlow? I can’t get the pumps to suck. By God! it’s no child’s play.’

"I gave him the sounding-rod and lay down again, trying to think of various things—but I thought only of the pumps. When I came on deck they were still at it, and my watch relieved at the pumps. By the light of the lantern brought on deck to examine the sounding-rod I caught a glimpse of their weary, serious faces. We pumped all the four hours. We pumped all night, all day, all the week—watch and watch. She was working herself loose, and leaked badly—not enough to drown us at once, but enough to kill us with the work at the pumps. And while we pumped the ship was going from us piecemeal: the bulwarks went, the stanchions were torn out, the ventilators smashed, the cabin-door burst in. There was not a dry spot in the ship. She was being gutted bit by bit. The long-boat changed, as if by magic, into matchwood where she stood in her gripes. I had lashed her myself, and was rather proud of my handiwork, which had withstood so long the malice of the sea. And we pumped. And there was no break in the weather. The sea was white like a sheet of foam, like a caldron of boiling milk; there



was not a break in the clouds, no—not the size of a man's hand—no, not for so much as ten seconds. There was for us no sky, there were for us no stars, no sun, no universe—nothing but angry clouds and an infuriated sea. We pumped watch and watch, for dear life ; and it seemed to last for months, for years, for all eternity, as though we had been dead and gone to a hell for sailors. We forgot the day of the week, the name of the month, what year it was, and whether we had ever been ashore. The sails blew away, she lay broadside on under a weather-cloth, the ocean poured over her, and we did not care. We turned those handles, and had the eyes of idiots. As soon as we had crawled on deck I used to take a round turn with a rope about the men, the pumps, and the mainmast, and we turned, we turned incessantly, with the water to our waists, to our necks, over our heads. It was all one. We had forgotten how it felt to be dry.

“And there was somewhere in me the thought : By Jove ! this is the deuce of an adventure—something you read about ; and it is my first voyage as second mate—and I am only twenty—and here I am lasting it out as well as any of these men, and keeping my chaps up to the mark. I was pleased. I would not have given up the experience for worlds. I had moments of exultation. Whenever the old dismantled craft pitched heavily with her counter high in the air, she seemed to me to throw up, like an appeal, like a defiance, like a cry to the clouds without mercy, the words written on her stern : ‘*Judea, London. Do or Die.*’

“O youth ! The strength of it, the faith of it, the

imagination of it ! To me she was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight—to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life. I think of her with pleasure, with affection, with regret—as you would think of someone dead you have loved. I shall never forget her. . . . Pass the bottle.

“One night when tied to the mast, as I explained, we were pumping on, deafened with the wind, and without spirit enough in us to wish ourselves dead, a heavy sea crashed aboard and swept clean over us. As soon as I got my breath I shouted, as in duty bound, ‘Keep on, boys!’ when suddenly I felt something hard floating on deck strike the calf of my leg. I made a grab at it and missed. It was so dark we could not see each other’s faces within a foot—you understand.

“After that thump the ship kept quiet for a while, and the thing, whatever it was, struck my leg again. This time I caught it—and it was a sauce-pan. At first, being stupid with fatigue and thinking of nothing but the pumps, I did not understand what I had in my hand. Suddenly it dawned upon me, and I shouted, ‘Boys, the house on deck is gone. Leave this, and let’s look for the cook.’

“There was a deck-house forward, which contained the galley, the cook’s berth, and the quarters of the crew. As we had expected for days to see it swept away, the hands had been ordered to sleep in the cabin—the only safe place in the ship. The steward, Abraham, however, persisted in clinging to his berth, stupidly, like a mule—from sheer fright I believe, like an animal that won’t leave a stable falling in an

earthquake. So we went to look for him. It was chancing death, since once out of our lashings we were as exposed as if on a raft. But we went. The house was shattered as if a shell had exploded inside. Most of it had gone overboard—stove, men's quarters, and their property, all was gone ; but two posts holding a portion of the bulkhead to which Abraham's bunk was attached, remained as if by a miracle. We groped in the ruins and came upon this, and there he was, sitting in his bunk, surrounded by foam and wreckage, jabbering cheerfully to himself. He was out of his mind ; completely and for ever mad, with this sudden shock coming upon the fag-end of his endurance. We snatched him up, lugged him aft, and pitched him head-first down the cabin companion. You understand there was no time to carry him down with infinite precautions and wait to see how he got on. Those below would pick him up at the bottom of the stairs all right. We were in a hurry to go back to the pumps. That business could not wait. A bad leak is an inhuman thing.

"One would think that the sole purpose of that fiendish gale had been to make a lunatic of that poor devil of a mulatto. It eased before morning, and the next day the sky cleared, and as the sea went down the leak took up. When it came to bending a fresh set of sails the crew demanded to put back—and really there was nothing else to do. Boats gone, decks swept clean, cabin gutted, men without a stitch but what they stood in, stores spoiled, ship strained. We put her head for home, and—would you believe it ? The wind came east right in our teeth. It blew fresh, it blew continuously. We had

to beat up every inch of the way, but she did not leak so badly, the water keeping comparatively smooth. Two hours' pumping in every four is no joke—but it kept her afloat as far as Falmouth.

“The good people there live on casualties of the sea, and no doubt were glad to see us. A hungry crowd of shipwrights sharpened their chisels at the sight of that carcass of a ship. And, by Jove ! they had pretty pickings off us before they were done. I fancy the owner was already in a tight place. There were delays. Then it was decided to take part of the cargo out and caulk her topsides. This was done, the repairs finished, cargo reshipped ; a new crew came on board, and we went out—for Bangkok. At the end of a week we were back again. The crew said they weren't going to Bangkok—a hundred and fifty days' passage—in a something hooker that wanted pumping eight hours out of the twenty-four ; and the nautical papers inserted again the little paragraph : ‘ *Judea*. Barque. Tyne to Bangkok ; coals ; put back to Falmouth leaky and with crew refusing duty.’

“There were more delays—more tinkering. The owner came down for a day, and said she was as right as a little fiddle. Poor old Captain Beard looked like the ghost of a Geordie skipper—through the worry and humiliation of it. Remember he was sixty and it was his first command. Mahon said it was a foolish business, and would end badly. I loved the ship more than ever, and wanted awfully to get to Bangkok. To Bangkok ! Magic name, blessed name. Mesopotamia wasn't a patch on it. Remember I was twenty, and it was my first second

mate's billet, and the East was waiting for me.

"We went out and anchored in the outer roads with a fresh crew—the third. She leaked worse than ever. It was as if those confounded shipwrights had actually made a hole in her. This time we did not even go outside. The crew simply refused to man the windlass.

"They towed us back to the inner harbour, and we became a fixture, a feature, an institution of the place. People pointed us out to visitors as 'That 'ere barque that's going to Bangkok—has been here six months—put back three times.' On holidays the small boys pulling about in boats would hail, '*Judea*, ahoy !' and if a head showed above the rail shouted, 'Where you bound to?—Bangkok?' and jeered. We were only three on board. The poor old skipper mooned in the cabin. Mahon undertook the cooking, and unexpectedly developed all a Frenchman's genius for preparing nice little messes. I looked languidly after the rigging. We became citizens of Falmouth. Every shopkeeper knew us. At the barber's or tobacconist's they asked familiarly, 'Do you think you will ever get to Bangkok?' Meantime the owner, the underwriters, and the charterers squabbled amongst themselves in London, and our pay went on. . . . Pass the bottle.

"It was horrid. Morally it was worse than pumping for life. It seemed as though we had been forgotten by the world, belonged to nobody, would get nowhere ; it seemed that, as if bewitched, we would have to live for ever and ever in that inner harbour, a derision and a byword to generations of long-shore

loafers and dishonest boatmen. I obtained three months' pay and a five days' leave, and made a rush for London. It took me a day to get there and pretty well another to come back—but three months' pay went all the same. I don't know what I did with it. I went to a music-hall, I believe, lunched, dined, and supped in a swell place in Regent Street, and was back to time, with nothing but a complete set of Byron's works and a new railway rug to show for three months' work. The boatman who pulled me off to the ship said: 'Hallo! I thought you had left the old thing. *She* will never get to Bankok.' 'That's all *you* know about it,' I said scornfully—but I didn't like that prophecy at all.

"Suddenly a man, some kind of agent to somebody, appeared with full powers. He had grogg-blossoms all over his face, an indomitable energy, and was a jolly soul. We leaped into life again. A hulk came alongside, took our cargo, and then we went into dry dock to get our copper stripped. No wonder she leaked. The poor thing, strained beyond endurance by the gale, had, as if in disgust, spat out all the oakum of her lower seams. She was recaulked, new coppered, and made as tight as a bottle. We went back to the hulk and reshipped our cargo.

"Then, on a fine moonlight night, all the rats left the ship.

"We had been infested with them. They had destroyed our sails, consumed more stores than the crew, affably shared our beds and our dangers, and now, when the ship was made seaworthy, concluded

to clear out. I called Mahon to enjoy the spectacle. Rat after rat appeared on our rail, took a last look over his shoulder, and leaped with a hollow thud into the empty hulk. We tried to count them, but soon lost the tale. Mahon said : ' Well, well ! don't talk to me about the intelligence of rats. They ought to have left before, when we had that narrow squeak from foundering. There you have the proof how silly is the superstition about them. They leave a good ship for an old rotten hulk, where there is nothing to eat, too, the fools ! . . . I don't believe they know what is safe or what is good for them, any more than you or I.'

" And after some more talk we agreed that the wisdom of rats had been grossly overrated, being in fact no greater than that of men.

" The story of the ship was known, by this, all up the Channel from Land's End to the Forelands, and we could get no crew on the south coast. They sent us one all complete from Liverpool, and we left once more—for Bankok.

" We had fair breezes, smooth water right into the tropics, and the old *Judea* lumbered along in the sunshine. When she went eight knots everything cracked aloft, and we tied our caps to our heads ; but mostly she strolled on at the rate of three miles an hour. What could you expect ? She was tired—that old ship. Her youth was where mine is—where yours is—you fellows who listen to this yarn ; and what friend would throw your years and your weariness in your face ? We didn't grumble at her. To us aft, at least, it seemed as though we had been born in her, reared in her, had lived in her for ages,



had never known any other ship. I would just as soon have abused the old village church at home for not being a cathedral.

“And for me there was also my youth to make me patient. There was all the East before me, and all life, and the thought that I had been tried in that ship and had come out pretty well. And I thought of men of old who, centuries ago, went that road in ships that sailed no better, to the land of palms, and spices, and yellow sands, and of brown nations ruled by kings more cruel than Nero the Roman and more splendid than Solomon the Jew. The old barque lumbered on, heavy with her age and the burden of her cargo, while I lived the life of youth in ignorance and hope. She lumbered on through an interminable procession of days; and the fresh gilding flashed back at the setting sun, seemed to cry out over the darkening sea the words painted on her stern, ‘*Judea, London. Do or Die.*’

“Then we entered the Indian Ocean and steered northerly for Java Head. The winds were light. Weeks slipped by. She crawled on, do or die, and people at home began to think of posting us as overdue.

“One Saturday evening, I being off duty, the men asked me to give them an extra bucket of water or so—for washing clothes. As I did not wish to screw on the fresh-water pump so late, I went forward whistling, and with a key in my hand to unlock the forepeak scuttle, intending to serve the water out of a spare tank we kept there.

“The smell down below was as unexpected as it was frightful. One would have thought hundreds of



paraffin-lamps had been flaring and smoking in that hole for days. I was glad to get out. The man with me coughed and said, 'Funny smell, sir.' I answered negligently, 'It's good for the health they say,' and walked aft.

"The first thing I did was to put my head down the square of the midship ventilator. As I lifted the lid a visible breath, something like a thin fog, a puff of faint haze, rose from the opening. The ascending air was hot, and had a heavy, sooty, paraffiny smell. I gave one sniff, and put down the lid gently. It was no use choking myself. The cargo was on fire.

"Next day she began to smoke in earnest. You see it was to be expected, for though the coal was of a safe kind, that cargo had been so handled, so broken up with handling, that it looked more like smithy coal than anything else. Then it had been wetted—more than once. It rained all the time we were taking it back from the hulk, and now with this long passage it got heated, and there was another case of spontaneous combustion.

"The captain called us into the cabin. He had a chart spread on the table, and looked unhappy. He said, 'The coast of West Australia is near, but I mean to proceed to our destination. It is the hurricane month too ; but we will just keep her head for Bangkok, and fight the fire. No more putting back anywhere, if we all get roasted. We will try first to stifle this 'ere damned combustion by want of air.'

"We tried. We battened down everything, and still she smoked. The smoke kept coming out through imperceptible crevices ; it forced itself through bulkheads and covers ; it oozed here and

there and everywhere in slender threads, in an invisible film, in an incomprehensible manner. It made its way into the cabin, into the forecastle ; it poisoned the sheltered places on the deck, it could be sniffed as high as the mainyard. It was clear that if the smoke came out the air came in. This was disheartening. This combustion refused to be stifled.

"We resolved to try water, and took the hatches off. Enormous volumes of smoke, whitish, yellowish, thick, greasy, misty, choking, ascended as high as the trucks. All hands cleared out aft. Then the poisonous cloud blew away, and we went back to work in a smoke that was no thicker now than that of an ordinary factory chimney.

"We rigged the force-pump, got the hose along, and by-and-by it burst. Well, it was as old as the ship—a prehistoric hose, and past repair. Then we pumped with the feeble head-pump, drew water with buckets, and in this way managed in time to pour lots of Indian Ocean into the main-hatch. The bright stream flashed in sunshine, fell into a layer of white crawling smoke, and vanished on the black surface of coal. Steam ascended mingling with the smoke. We poured salt water as into a barrel without a bottom. It was our fate to pump in that ship, to pump out of her, to pump into her ; and after keeping water out of her to save ourselves from being drowned, we frantically poured water into her to save ourselves from being burnt.

"And she crawled on, do or die, in the serene weather. The sky was a miracle of purity, a miracle of azure. The sea was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone, extend-

ing on all sides, all round to the horizon—as if the whole terrestrial globe had been one jewel, one colossal sapphire, a single gem fashioned into a planet. And on the lustre of the great calm waters the *Judea* glided imperceptibly, enveloped in languid and unclean vapours, in a lazy cloud that drifted to leeward, light and slow : a pestiferous cloud defiling the splendour of sea and sky.

“All this time of course we saw no fire. The cargo smouldered at the bottom somewhere. Once Mahon, as we were working side by side, said to me with a queer smile : ‘ Now, if she only would spring a tidy leak—like that time when we first left the Channel—it would put a stopper on this fire. Wouldn’t it ? ’ I remarked irrelevantly, ‘ Do you remember the rats ? ’

“We fought the fire and sailed the ship too as carefully as though nothing had been the matter. The steward cooked and attended on us. Of the other twelve men, eight worked while four rested. Everyone took his turn, captain included. There was equality, and if not exactly fraternity, then a deal of good feeling. Sometimes a man, as he dashed a bucketful of water down the hatchway, would yell out, ‘ Hurrah for Bangkok ! ’ and the rest laughed. But generally we were taciturn and serious—and thirsty. Oh ! how thirsty ! And we had to be careful with the water. Strict allowance. The ship smoked, the sun blazed. . . . Pass the bottle.

“We tried everything. We even made an attempt to dig down to the fire. No good, of course. No man could remain more than a minute below. Mahon, who went first, fainted there, and the man

who went to fetch him out did likewise. We lugged them out on deck. Then I leaped down to show how easily it could be done. They had learned wisdom by that time, and contented themselves by fishing for me with a chain-hook tied to a broom-handle, I believe. I did not offer to go and fetch up my shovel, which was left down below.

"Things began to look bad. We put the long-boat into the water. The second boat was ready to swing out. We had also another, a 14-foot thing, on davits aft, where it was quite safe.

"Then, behold, the smoke suddenly decreased. We redoubled our efforts to flood the bottom of the ship. In two days there was no smoke at all. Everybody was on the broad grin. This was on a Friday. On Saturday no work, but sailing the ship of course, was done. The men washed their clothes and their faces for the first time in a fortnight, and had a special dinner given them. They spoke of spontaneous combustion with contempt, and implied *they* were the boys to put out combustions. Somehow we all felt as though we each had inherited a large fortune. But a beastly smell of burning hung about the ship. Captain Beard had hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. I had never noticed so much before how twisted and bowed he was. He and Mahon prowled soberly about hatches and ventilators, sniffing. It struck me suddenly poor Mahon was a very, very old chap. As to me, I was as pleased and proud as though I had helped to win a great naval battle. ~~O! Youth!~~

"The night was fine. In the morning a homeward-bound ship passed us hull down—the first we

had seen for months ; but we were nearing the land at last, Java Head being about 190 miles off, and nearly due north.

“ Next day it was my watch on deck from eight to twelve. At breakfast the captain observed, ‘ It’s wonderful how that smell hangs about the cabin.’ About ten, the mate being on the poop, I stepped down on the main-deck for a moment. The carpenter’s bench stood abaft the mainmast : I leaned against it sucking at my pipe, and the carpenter, a young chap, came to talk to me. He remarked, ‘ I think we have done very well, haven’t we ? ’ and then I perceived with annoyance the fool was trying to tilt the bench. I said curtly, ‘ Don’t, Chips,’ and immediately became aware of a queer sensation, of an absurd delusion—I seemed somehow to be in the air. I heard all round me like a pent-up breath released—as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo !—and felt a dull concussion which made my ribs ache suddenly. No doubt about it—I was in the air, and my body was describing a short parabola. But short as it was, I had the time to think several thoughts in, as far as I can remember, the following order : ‘ This can’t be the carpenter—What is it ?—Some accident—Submarine volcano ?—Coals, gas !—By Jove ! we are being blown up—Everybody’s dead—I am falling into the after-hatch—I see fire in it.’

“ The coal-dust suspended in the air of the hold had glowed dull-red at the moment of the explosion. In the twinkling of an eye, in an infinitesimal fraction of a second since the first tilt of the bench, I was sprawling full length on the cargo. I picked myself

up and scrambled out. It was quick like a rebound. The deck was a wilderness of smashed timber, lying crosswise like trees in a wood after a hurricane ; an immense curtain of soiled rags waved gently before me—it was the mainsail blown to strips. I thought, The masts will be toppling over directly ; and to get out of the way bolted on all-fours towards the poop-ladder. The first person I saw was Mahon, with eyes like saucers, his mouth open, and the long white hair standing straight on end round his head like a silver halo. He was just about to go down when the sight of the main-deck stirring, heaving up, and changing into splinters before his eyes, petrified him on the top step. I stared at him in unbelief, and he stared at me with a queer kind of shocked curiosity. I did not know that I had no hair, no eyebrows, no eyelashes, that my young moustache was burnt off, that my face was black, one cheek laid open, my nose cut, and my chin bleeding. I had lost my cap, one of my slippers, and my shirt was torn to rags. Of all this I was not aware. I was amazed to see the ship, still afloat, the poop-deck whole—and, most of all, to see anybody alive. Also the peace of the sky and the serenity of the sea were distinctly surprising. I suppose I expected to see them convulsed with horror. . . . Pass the bottle.

“ There was a voice hailing the ship from somewhere—in the air, in the sky—I couldn’t tell. Presently I saw the captain—and he was mad. He asked me eagerly, ‘ Where’s the cabin-table ? ’ and to hear such a question was a frightful shock. I had just been blown up, you understand, and vibrated with that experience—I wasn’t quite sure whether

I was alive. Mahon began to stamp with both feet and yelled at him, 'Good God! don't you see the deck's blown out of her?' I found my voice and stammered out as if conscious of some gross neglect of duty, 'I don't know where the cabin-table is.' It was like an absurd dream.

"Do you know what he wanted next? Well, he wanted to trim the yards. Very placidly, and as if lost in thought, he insisted on having the foreyard squared. 'I don't know if there's anybody alive,' said Mahon, almost tearfully. 'Surely,' he said gently, 'there will be enough left to square the foreyard.'

"The old chap, it seems, was in his own berth, winding up the chronometers, when the shock sent him spinning. Immediately it occurred to him—as he said afterwards—that the ship had struck something, and he ran out into the cabin. There, he saw, the cabin-table had vanished somewhere. The deck being blown up, it had fallen down into the lazarette of course. Where we had our breakfast that morning he saw only a great hole in the floor. This appeared to him so awfully mysterious, and impressed him so immensely, that what he saw and heard after he got on deck were mere trifles in comparison. And, mark, he noticed directly the wheel deserted and his barque off her course—and his only thought was to get that miserable, stripped, undecked, smouldering shell of a ship back again with her head pointing at her port of destination. Bankok! That's what he was after. I tell you this quiet, bowed, bandy-legged, almost deformed little man was immense in the singleness of his idea and in his placid ignorance of



our agitation. He motioned us forward with a commanding gesture, and went to take the wheel himself.

“Yes ; that was the first thing we did—trim the yards of that wreck ! No one was killed, or even disabled, but everyone was more or less hurt. You should have seen them ! Some were in rags, with black faces, like coalheavers, like sweeps, and had bullet heads that seemed closely cropped, but were in fact singed to the skin. Others, of the watch below, awakened by being shot out from their collapsing bunks, shivered incessantly, and kept on groaning even as we went about our work. But they all worked. That crew of Liverpool hard cases had in them the right stuff. It’s my experience they always have. It is the sea that gives it—the vastness, the loneliness surrounding their dark stolid souls. Ah ! Well ! we stumbled, we crept, we fell, we barked our shins on the wreckage, we hauled. The masts stood, but we did not know how much they might be charred down below. It was nearly calm, but a long swell ran from the west and made her roll. They might go at any moment. We looked at them with apprehension. One could not foresee which way they would fall.

“Then we retreated aft and looked about us. The deck was a tangle of planks on edge, of planks on end, of splinters, of ruined woodwork. The masts rose from that chaos like big trees above a matted undergrowth. The interstices of that mass of wreckage were full of something whitish, sluggish, stirring—of something that was like a greasy fog. The smoke of the invisible fire was coming up again,



was trailing, like a poisonous thick mist in some valley choked with dead-wood. Already lazy wisps were beginning to curl upwards amongst the mass of splinters. Here and there a piece of timber, stuck upright, resembled a post. Half of a fife-rail had been shot through the foresail, and the sky made a patch of glorious blue in the ignobly soiled canvas. A portion of several boards holding together had fallen across the rail, and one end protruded overboard, like a gangway leading upon nothing, like a gangway leading over the deep sea, leading to death—as if inviting us to walk the plank at once and be done with our ridiculous troubles. And still the air, the sky—a ghost, something invisible was hailing the ship.

“Someone had the sense to look over, and there was the helmsman, who had impulsively jumped overboard, anxious to come back. He yelled and swam lustily like a merman, keeping up with the ship. We threw him a rope, and presently he stood amongst us streaming with water and very crest-fallen. The captain had surrendered the wheel, and apart, elbow on rail and chin in hand, gazed at the sea wistfully. We asked ourselves, What next? I thought, Now, this is something like. This is great. I wonder what will happen. O youth!

“Suddenly Mahon sighted a steamer far astern. Captain Beard said, ‘We may do something with her yet.’ We hoisted two flags, which said in the international language of the sea, ‘On fire. Want immediate assistance.’ The steamer grew bigger rapidly, and by-and-by spoke with two flags on her foremast, ‘I am coming to your assistance.’

"In half an hour she was abreast, to windward within hail, and rolling slightly, with her engines stopped. We lost our composure, and yelled all together with excitement, 'We've been blown up.' A man in a white helmet, on the bridge, cried, 'Yes! All right! all right!' and he nodded his head, and smiled, and made soothing motions with his hand as though at a lot of frightened children. One of the boats dropped in the water, and walked towards us upon the sea with her long oars. Four Calashes pulled a swinging stroke. This was my first sight of Malay seamen. I've known them since, but what struck me then was their unconcern: they came alongside, and even the bowman standing up and holding to our main-chains with the boat-hook did not deign to lift his head for a glance. I thought people who had been blown up deserved more attention.

"A little man, dry like a chip and agile like a monkey, clambered up. It was the mate of the steamer. He gave one look, and cried, 'O boys—you had better quit.'

"We were silent. He talked apart with the captain for a time—seemed to argue with him. Then they went away together to the steamer.

"When our skipper came back we learned that the steamer was the *Sommerville*, Captain Nash, from West Australia to Singapore *via* Batavia with mails, and that the agreement was she should tow us to Anjer or Batavia, if possible, where we could extinguish the fire by scuttling, and then proceed on our voyage—to Bankok! The old man seemed excited. 'We will do it yet,' he said to Mahon

fiercely. He shook his fist at the sky. Nobody else said a word.

"At noon the steamer began to tow. She went ahead slim and high, and what was left of the *Judea* followed at the end of seventy fathom of tow-rope—followed her swiftly like a cloud of smoke with mast-heads protruding above. We went aloft to furl the sails. We coughed on the yards, and were careful about the bunts. Do you see the lot of us there, putting a neat furl on the sails of that ship doomed to arrive nowhere? There was not a man who didn't think that at any moment the masts would topple over. From aloft we could not see the ship for smoke, and they worked carefully, passing the gaskets with even turns. 'Harbour furl—aloft there!' cried Mahon from below.

"You understand this? I don't think one of those chaps expected to get down in the usual way. When we did I heard them saying to each other, 'Well, I thought we would come down overboard, in a lump—sticks and all—blame me if I didn't.' 'That's what I was thinking to myself,' would answer wearily another battered and bandaged scarecrow. And, mind, these were men without the drilled-in habit of obedience. To an onlooker they would be a lot of profane scallywags without a redeeming point. What made them do it—what made them obey me when I, thinking consciously how fine it was, made them drop the bunt of the foresail twice to try and do it better? What? They had no professional reputation—no examples, no praise. It wasn't a sense of duty; they all knew well enough how to shirk, and laze, and dodge—when they had a mind

to it—and mostly they had. Was it the two pounds ten a-month that sent them there? They didn't think their pay half good enough. No; it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting. I don't say positively that the crew of a French or German merchantman wouldn't have done it, but I doubt whether it would have been done in the same way. There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct—a disclosure of something secret—of that hidden something, that gift of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations.

"It was that night at ten that, for the first time since we had been fighting it, we saw the fire. The speed of the towing had fanned the smouldering destruction. A blue gleam appeared forward, shining below the wreck of the deck. It wavered in patches, it seemed to stir and creep like the light of a glowworm. I saw it first, and told Mahon. 'Then the game's up,' he said. 'We had better stop this towing, or she will burst out suddenly fore and aft before we can clear out.' We set up a yell; rang bells to attract their attention; they towed on. At last Mahon and I had to crawl forward and cut the rope with an axe. There was no time to cast off the lashings. Red tongues could be seen licking the wilderness of splinters under our feet as we made our way back to the poop.

"Of course they very soon found out in the steamer that the rope was gone. She gave a loud blast of her whistle, her lights were seen sweeping in a wide circle, she came up ranging close alongside, and stopped. We were all in a tight group on

the poop looking at her. Every man had saved a little bundle or a bag. Suddenly a conical flame with a twisted top shot up forward and threw upon the black sea a circle of light, with the two vessels side by side and heaving gently in its centre. Captain Beard had been sitting on the gratings still and mute for hours, but now he rose slowly and advanced in front of us, to the mizzen-shrouds. Captain Nash hailed : ' Come along ! Look sharp. I have mail-bags on board. I will take you and your boats to Singapore.'

" ' Thank you ! No ! ' said our skipper. ' We must see the last of the ship.'

" ' I can't stand by any longer,' shouted the other. ' Mails—you know.'

" ' Ay ! ay ! We are all right.'

" ' Very well ! I'll report you in Singapore. . . . Good-bye ! '

" He waved his hand. Our men dropped their bundles quietly. The steamer moved ahead, and passing out of the circle of light, vanished at once from our sight, dazzled by the fire which burned fiercely. And then I knew that I would see the East first as commander of a small boat. I thought it fine ; and the fidelity to the old ship was fine. We should see the last of her. Oh the glamour of youth ! Oh the fire of it, more dazzling than the flames of the burning ship, throwing a magic light on the wide earth, leaping audaciously to the sky, presently to be quenched by time, more cruel, more pitiless, more bitter than the sea—and like the flames of the burning ship surrounded by an impenetrable night.

. . . . .

"The old man warned us in his gentle and inflexible way that it was part of our duty to save for the underwriter's as much as we could of the ship's gear. Accordingly we went to work aft, while she blazed forward to give us plenty of light. We lugged out a lot of rubbish. What didn't we save? An old barometer fixed with an absurd quantity of screws nearly cost me my life: a sudden rush of smoke came upon me, and I just got away in time. There were various stores, bolts of canvas, coils of rope; the poop looked like a marine bazaar, and the boats were lumbered to the gunwales. One would have thought the old man wanted to take as much as he could of his first command with him. He was very, very quiet, but off his balance evidently. Would you believe it? He wanted to take a length of old stream-cable and a kedge-anchor with him in the long-boat. We said, 'Ay, ay, sir,' deferentially, and on the quiet let the things slip overboard. The heavy medicine-chest went that way, two bags of green coffee, tins of paint—fancy, paint!—a whole lot of things. Then I was ordered with two hands into the boats to make a stowage and get them ready against the time it would be proper for us to leave the ship.

"We put everything straight, stepped the long-boat's mast for our skipper, who was to take charge of her, and I was not sorry to sit down for a moment. My face felt raw, every limb ached as if broken, I was aware of all my ribs, and would have sworn to a twist in the backbone. The boats, fast astern, lay in a deep shadow, and all around I could see

the circle of the sea lighted by the fire. A gigantic flame rose forward straight and clear. It flared fierce, with noises like the whirr of wings, with rumbles as of thunder. There were cracks, detonations, and from the cone of flame the sparks flew upwards, as man is born to trouble, to leaky ships, and to ships that burn.

"What bothered me was that the ship, lying broadside to the swell and to such wind as there was—a mere breath—the boats would not keep astern where they were safe, but persisted, in a pig-headed way boats have, in getting under the counter and then swinging alongside. They were knocking about dangerously and coming near the flame, while the ship rolled on them, and, of course, there was always the danger of the masts going over the side at any moment. I and my two boat-keepers kept them off as best we could, with oars and boat-hooks; but to be constantly at it became exasperating, since there was no reason why we should not leave at once. We could not see those on board, nor could we imagine what caused the delay. The boat-keepers were swearing feebly, and I had not only my share of the work but also had to keep at it two men who showed a constant inclination to lay themselves down and let things slide.

"At last I hailed, 'On deck there,' and someone looked over. 'We're ready here,' I said. The head disappeared, and very soon popped up again. 'The captain says, All right, sir, and to keep the boats well clear of the ship.'

"Half an hour passed. Suddenly there was a frightful racket, rattle, clanking of chain, hiss of



water, and millions of sparks flew up into the shivering column of smoke that stood leaning slightly above the ship. The cat-heads had burned away, and the two red-hot anchors had gone to the bottom, tearing out after them two hundred fathom of red-hot chain. The ship trembled, the mass of flame swayed as if ready to collapse, and the fore top-gallant-mast fell. It darted down like an arrow of fire, shot under, and instantly leaping up within an oar's-length of the boats, floated quietly, very black on the luminous sea. I hailed the deck again. After some time a man in an unexpectedly cheerful but also muffled tone, as though he had been trying to speak with his mouth shut, informed me, 'Coming directly, sir,' and vanished. For a long time I heard nothing but the whirr and roar of the fire. There were also whistling sounds. The boats jumped, tugged at the painters, ran at each other playfully, knocked their sides together, or, do what we would, swung in a bunch against the ship's side. I couldn't stand it any longer, and swarming up a rope, clambered aboard over the stern.

"It was as bright as day. Coming up like this, the sheet of fire facing me, was a terrifying sight, and the heat seemed hardly bearable at first. On a settee cushion dragged out of the cabin, Captain Beard, his legs drawn up and one arm under his head, slept with the light playing on him. Do you know what the rest were busy about? They were sitting on deck right aft, round an open case, eating bread and cheese and drinking bottled stout.

"On the background of flames twisting in fierce tongues above their heads they seemed at home like



salamanders, and looked like a band of desperate pirates. The fire sparkled in the whites of their eyes, gleamed on patches of white skin seen through the torn shirts. Each had the marks as of a battle about him—bandaged heads, tied-up arms, a strip of dirty rag round a knee—and each man had a bottle between his legs and a chunk of cheese in his hand. Mahon got up. With his handsome and disreputable head, his hooked profile, his long white beard, and with an uncorked bottle in his hand, he resembled one of those reckless sea-robbers of old making merry amidst violence and disaster. ‘The last meal on board,’ he explained solemnly. ‘We had nothing to eat all day, and it was no use leaving all this.’ He flourished the bottle and indicated the sleeping skipper. ‘He said he couldn’t swallow anything, so I got him to lie down,’ he went on ; and as I stared, ‘I don’t know whether you are aware, young fellow, the man had no sleep to speak of for days—and there will be dam’ little sleep in the boats.’ ‘There will be no boats by-and-by if you fool about much longer,’ I said indignantly. I walked up to the skipper and shook him by the shoulder. At last he opened his eyes, but did not move. ‘Time to leave her, sir,’ I said quietly.

“He got up painfully, looked at the flames, at the sea sparkling round the ship, and black, black as ink farther away ; he looked at the stars shining dim through a thin veil of smoke in a sky black, black as Erebus.

“ ‘Youngest first,’ he said.

“And the ordinary seaman, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, got up, clambered over the

taffrail, and vanished. Others followed. One, on the point of going over, stopped short to drain his bottle, and with a great swing of his arm flung it at the fire. 'Take this !' he cried.

"The skipper lingered disconsolately, and we left him to commune alone for a while with his first command. Then I went up again and brought him away at last. It was time. The ironwork on the poop was hot to the touch.

"Then the painter of the long-boat was cut, and the three boats, tied together, drifted clear of the ship. It was just sixteen hours after the explosion when we abandoned her. Mahon had charge of the second boat, and I had the smallest—the 14-foot thing. The long-boat would have taken the lot of us ; but the skipper said we must save as much property as we could—for the underwriters—and so I got my first command. I had two men with me, a bag of biscuits, a few tins of meat, and a breaker of water. I was ordered to keep close to the long-boat, that in case of bad weather we might be taken into her.

"And do you know what I thought ? I thought I would part company as soon as I could. I wanted to have my first command all to myself. I wasn't going to sail in a squadron if there were a chance for independent cruising. I would make land by myself. I would beat the other boats. Youth ! All youth ! The silly, charming, beautiful youth.

"But we did not make a start at once. We must see the last of the ship. And so the boats drifted about that night, heaving and setting on the swell. The men dozed, waked, sighed, groaned. I looked at the burning ship.

“Between the darkness of earth and heaven she was burning fiercely upon a disc of purple sea shot by the blood-red play of gleams; upon a disc of water glittering and sinister. A high, clear flame, an immense and lonely flame, ascended from the ocean, and from its summit the black smoke poured continuously at the sky. She burned furiously, mournful and imposing like a funeral pile kindled in the night, surrounded by the sea, watched over by the stars. A magnificent death had come like a grace, like a gift, like a reward to that old ship at the end of her laborious days. The surrender of her weary ghost to the keeping of stars and sea was stirring like the sight of a glorious triumph. The masts fell just before daybreak, and for a moment there was a burst and turmoil of sparks that seemed to fill with flying fire the night patient and watchful, the vast night lying silent upon the sea. At daylight she was only a charred shell, floating still under a cloud of smoke and bearing a glowing mass of coal within.

“Then the oars were got out, and the boats forming in a line moved round her remains as if in procession—the long-boat leading. As we pulled across her stern a slim dart of fire shot out viciously at us, and suddenly she went down, head first, in a great hiss of steam. The unconsumed stern was the last to sink; but the paint had gone, had cracked, had peeled off, and there were no letters, there was no word, no stubborn device that was like her soul, to flash at the rising sun her creed and her name.

“We made our way north. A breeze sprang up, and about noon all the boats came together for the

last time. I had no mast or sail in mine, but I made a mast out of a spare oar and hoisted a boat-awning for a sail, with a boat-hook for a yard. She was certainly over-masted, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that with the wind aft I could beat the other two. I had to wait for them. Then we all had a look at the captain's chart, and, after a sociable meal of hard bread and water, got our last instructions. These were simple : steer north, and keep together as much as possible. ' Be careful with that jury-rig, Marlow,' said the captain ; and Mahon, as I sailed proudly past his boat, wrinkled his curved nose and hailed, ' You will sail that ship of yours under water, if you don't look out, young fellow.' He was a malicious old man—and may the deep sea where he sleeps now rock him gently, rock him tenderly to the end of time !

" Before sunset a thick rain-squall passed over the two boats, which were far astern, and that was the last I saw of them for a time. Next day I sat steering my cockle-shell—my first command—with nothing but water and sky around me. I did sight in the afternoon the upper sails of a ship far away, but said nothing, and my men did not notice her. You see I was afraid she might be homeward bound, and I had no mind to turn back from the portals of the East. I was steering for Java—another blessed name—like Bangkok, you know. I steered many days.

" I need not tell you what it is to be knocking about in an open boat. I remember nights and days of calm when we pulled, we pulled, and the boat seemed to stand still, as if bewitched within the

circle of the sea horizon. I remember the heat, the deluge of rain-squalls that kept us baling for dear life (but filled our water-cask), and I remember sixteen hours on end with a mouth dry as a cinder and a steering-oar over the stern to keep my first command head on to a breaking sea. I did not know how good a man I was till then. I remember the drawn faces, the dejected figures of my two men, and I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more—the feeling that I could last for ever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men ; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort—to death ; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires—and expires, too soon, too soon—before life itself.

“And this is how I see the East. I have seen its secret places and have looked into its very soul ; but now I see it always from a small boat, a high outline of mountains, blue and afar in the morning ; like faint mist at noon ; a jagged wall of purple at sunset. I have the feel of the oar in my hand, the vision of a scorching blue sea in my eyes. And I see a bay, a wide bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark. A red light burns far off upon the gloom of the land, and the night is soft and warm. We drag at the oars with aching arms, and suddenly a puff of wind, a puff faint and tepid and laden with strange odours of blossoms, of aromatic wood, comes out of the still night—the first sigh of the East on my face. That I can never forget. It was impalpable and enslaving, like a

charm, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight.

"We had been pulling this finishing spell for eleven hours. Two pulled, and he whose turn it was to rest sat at the tiller. We had made out the red light in that bay and steered for it, guessing it must mark some small coasting port. We passed two vessels, outlandish and high-sterned, sleeping at anchor, and, approaching the light, now very dim, ran the boat's nose against the end of a jutting wharf. We were blind with fatigue. My men dropped the oars and fell off the thwarts as if dead. I made fast to a pile. A current rippled softly. The scented obscurity of the shore was grouped into vast masses, a density of colossal clumps of vegetation, probably—mute and fantastic shapes. And at their foot the semicircle of a beach gleamed faintly, like an illusion. There was not a light, not a stir, not a sound. The mysterious East faced me, perfumed like a flower, silent like death, dark like a grave.

"And I sat weary beyond expression, exulting like a conqueror, sleepless and entranced as if before a profound, a fateful enigma.

"A splashing of oars, a measured dip reverberating on the level of water, intensified by the silence of the shore into loud claps, made me jump up. A boat, a European boat, was coming in. I invoked the name of the dead ; I hailed : *Judea* ahoy ! A thin shout answered.

"It was the captain. I had beaten the flagship by three hours, and I was glad to hear the old man's voice again, tremulous and tired. 'Is it you,

Marlow ?' 'Mind the end of that jetty, sir,' I cried.

"He approached cautiously, and brought up with the deep-sea lead-line which we had saved—for the underwriters. I eased my painter and fell alongside. He sat, a broken figure at the stern, wet with dew, his hands clasped in his lap. His men were asleep already. 'I had a terrible time of it,' he murmured. 'Mahon is behind—not very far.' We conversed in whispers, in low whispers, as if afraid to wake up the land. Guns, thunder, earthquakes would not have awakened the men just then.

"Looking round as we talked, I saw away at sea a bright light travelling in the night. 'There's a steamer passing the bay,' I said. She was not passing, she was entering, and she even came close and anchored. 'I wish,' said the old man, 'you would find out whether she is English. Perhaps they could give us a passage somewhere.' He seemed nervously anxious. So by dint of punching and kicking I started one of my men into a state of somnambulism, and giving him an oar, took another and pulled towards the lights of the steamer.

"There was a murmur of voices in her, metallic hollow clangs of the engine-room, footsteps on the deck. Her ports shone, round like dilated eyes. Shapes moved about, and there was a shadowy man high up on the bridge. He heard my oars.

"And then, before I could open my lips, the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice. A torrent of words was poured into the enigmatical, the fateful silence ; outlandish, angry words, mixed

with words and even whole sentences of good English, less strange but even more surprising. The voice swore and cursed violently ; it riddled the solemn peace of the bay by a volley of abuse. It began by calling me Pig, and from that went crescendo into unmentionable adjectives—in English. The man up there raged aloud in two languages, and with a sincerity in his fury that almost convinced me I had, in some way, sinned against the harmony of the universe. I could hardly see him, but began to think he would work himself into a fit.

“ Suddenly he ceased, and I could hear him snorting and blowing like a porpoise. I said—

“ ‘ What steamer is this, pray ? ’

“ ‘ Eh ? What’s this ? And who are you ? ’

“ ‘ Castaway crew of an English barque burnt at sea. We came here to-night. I am the second mate. The captain is in the long-boat, and wishes to know if you would give us a passage somewhere.’

“ ‘ Oh, my goodness ! I say. . . . This is the *Celestial* from Singapore on her return trip. I’ll arrange with your captain in the morning, . . . and, . . . I say, . . . did you hear me just now ? ’

“ ‘ I should think the whole bay heard you.’

“ ‘ I thought you were a shore-boat.’ Now, look here—this infernal lazy scoundrel of a caretaker has gone to sleep again—curse him. The light is out, and I nearly ran foul of the end of this damned jetty. This is the third time he plays me this trick. Now, I ask you, can anybody stand this kind of thing ? It’s enough to drive a man out of his mind. I’ll report him. . . . I’ll get the Assistant Resident to give him the sack, by . . . ! See—there’s no



light. It's out, isn't it? I take you to witness the light's out. There should be a light, you know. A red light on the——'

" 'There was a light.' I said mildly.

" 'But it's out, man! What's the use of talking like this? You can see for yourself it's out—don't you? If you had to take a valuable steamer along this God-forsaken coast you would want a light too. I'll kick him from end to end of his miserable wharf. You'll see if I don't. I will——'

" 'So I may tell my captain you'll take us?' I broke in.

" 'Yes, I'll take you. Good-night,' he said brusquely.

" I pulled back, made fast again to the jetty, and then went to sleep at last. I had faced the silence of the East. I had heard some of its language. But when I opened my eyes again the silence was as complete as though it had never been broken. I was lying in a flood of light, and the sky had never looked so far, so high, before. I opened my eyes and lay without moving.

" And then I saw the men of the East—they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement. They stared down at the boats, at the sleeping men who at night had come to them from the sea. Nothing moved. The fronds of palms stood still against the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of hidden houses peeped through the

green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise. And these were the men. I sat up suddenly. A wave of movement passed through the crowd from end to end, passed along the heads, swayed the bodies, ran along the jetty like a ripple on the water, like a breath of wind on a field—and all was still again. I see it now—the wide sweep of the bay, the glittering sands, the wealth of green infinite and varied, the sea blue like the sea of a dream, the crowd of attentive faces, the blaze of vivid colour—the water reflecting it all, the curve of the shore, the jetty, the high-sterned outlandish craft floating still, and the three boats with the tired men from the West sleeping, unconscious of the land and the people and of the violence of sunshine. They slept thrown across the thwarts, curled on bottom-boards, in the careless attitudes of death. The head of the old skipper, leaning back in the stern of the long-boat, had fallen on his breast, and he looked as though he would never wake. Farther out old Mahon's face was upturned to the sky, with the long white beard spread out on his breast, as though he had been shot where he sat at the tiller ; and a man, all in a heap in the bows of the boat, slept with both arms embracing the stem-head and with his cheek laid on the gunwale. The East looked at them without a sound.

“ I have known its fascination since : I have seen the mysterious shores, the still water, the lands of

brown nations, where a stealthy Nemesis lies in wait, pursues, overtakes so many of the conquering race, who are proud of their wisdom, of their knowledge, of their strength. But for me all the East is contained in that vision of my youth. It is all in that moment when I opened my young eyes on it. I came upon it from a tussle with the sea—and I was young—and I saw it looking at me. And this is all that is left of it ! Only a moment ; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour—of youth ! . . . A flick of sunshine upon a strange shore, the time to remember, the time for a sigh, and—good-bye !—Night—Good-bye . . . ! ”

He drank.

“ Ah ! The good old time—the good old time. Youth and the sea. Glamour and the sea ! The good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you.”

He drank again.

“ By all that’s wonderful, it is the sea, I believe, the sea itself—or is it youth alone ? Who can tell ? But you here—you all had something out of life : money, love—whatever one gets on shore—and, tell me, wasn’t that the best time, that time when we were young at sea ; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks—and sometimes a chance to feel your strength—that only—what you all regret ? ”

And we all nodded at him : the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled ;

our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love ; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions.

NOTES AND STUDY HELPS  
ON  
YOUTH: A NARRATIVE

*by*

ETHEL M. SEALEY

*Harbord Collegiate Institute  
Toronto*

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## A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski, known to us as Joseph Conrad, was born at Berdiczew, in Russian Poland, on December 3, 1857. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was, as Conrad says, "a Pole, a Catholic, a gentleman," a man of culture with a natural taste for good literature. His mother, Evelina Bobrowski, belonged to the same class of land-owning gentry. When Conrad was about five years of age, his father's participation in a patriotic Polish insurrection against Russian domination was punished by exile. Madame Korzeniowski, taking her young son with her, followed her husband; but homesickness and the rigours of the climate preyed upon a naturally delicate constitution, and she died in 1865, at the age of thirty-four. Four years later Conrad's father died in the city of Cracow. Thus, before he was twelve, the boy had lost both father and mother. His mother's brother took charge of him and gave him advice and help and affection.

In the year 1873 Conrad saw the sea for the first time when he visited Venice. Although he was inland bred, he had long set his heart on going to sea, and the next year, at the age of seventeen, he went to Marseilles. Here he was at home, as he spoke French fluently and wrote it with a nice feeling for style. He began to know the sea and during a period of apprenticeship made several short voyages. In April, 1878, he left on board the English steamer *Mavis*, bound for Constantinople with a cargo of coal. She returned with a cargo destined for Lowestoft. On the 18th of June, 1878, the vessel reached her port. In his twenty-first year Conrad, with only a few words of English at his command, set his foot for the first time on English soil. England

pleased him and he decided to study for the British Mercantile Marine, and to take out his naturalization papers. He obtained his mate's certificate as a result of an oral examination in English, and his master's certificate in 1884. In the course of long voyages he became familiar with the men and places that spring to vivid life in his books. His six years' connection with the East was ended in March, 1889. It was in September of that year, while he was loafing about London waiting for a command, that, following an impulse he could scarcely understand, he began to write *Almayer's Folly*, the story of people he had met two years before on the East coast of Borneo. This was the initiation into authorship of a sea captain who says of himself in *A Personal Record*:

I never made a note of a fact, of an impression or of an anecdote in my life. The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write; the ambition of being an author had never turned up among those gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself at times in the stillness and immobility of a day dream.

He left the sea for good in 1894, and from that time became a professional writer, choosing English as his vehicle. Of that choice he has two things to say. First, "English, the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours, too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions, of my very dreams." And again: "The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. As to adoption—well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language which, directly



I came out of the stammering stage, made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic career."

And so Conrad's passion for the sea and his passionate interest in the psychology of men find expression in a language which is not native to him but which he has enriched by his incomparable artistry and by his strength of soul.

His literary life was one of toil and anxiety, accompanied by almost ceaseless physical suffering. In his later years he had both fame and financial security. He died suddenly on August 3, 1924, passing like one of his own sailors, "from the extremity of struggle and stress and tremendous uproar—from the vast unrestful rage of the surface to the profound peace of the depths, sleeping untroubled since the beginning of the ages."

### USEFUL BOOKS

JESSIE CONRAD—

*Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him*

JOSEPH CONRAD—

*The Mirror of the Sea*

*The Nigger of the Narcissus* (particularly the Preface)

*A Personal Record*

G. JEAN-AUBRY—

*Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*

ANDRÉ MAUROIS—

*Prophets and Poets*

R. L. MEGROZ—

*Joseph Conrad's Mind and Method*

GUSTAV MORF—

*The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad*

FRANK SWINNERTON—

*The Georgian Literary Scene*

HUGH WALPOLE—

*Joseph Conrad*

### Conrad and *The Palestine*

On September 21, 1881, Conrad, then twenty-four years of age, sailed as second mate on board *The Palestine*, a London barque of 425 tons. The story of *The Palestine*, rechristened *The Judea*, is told in almost precise detail in *Youth*, which, therefore, is really a record or a chronicle, and not an invention. On September 17, 1882, *The Palestine* finally left Falmouth, the year having been occupied as definitely narrated in *Youth*, even to the detail of the visit to London and the return, after five days' leave, "with nothing but a complete set of Byron's works and a new railway rug to show for three months' work."

After leaving Falmouth, the ship had a good wind and calm sea as far as the Tropics. She lumbered along at about three miles an hour, but at last she entered the Indian Ocean and turned north toward Java Head. On March 11, 1883, the cargo was discovered to be on fire, and after four days the vessel was abandoned. (Conrad has lengthened this time a little in *Youth*). It is not certain how long the crew were in the open boats, but it is known that Conrad was in Singapore early in April, for the certificate of discharge of *The Palestine* is dated Singapore, April 3. At the beginning of May he embarked for Europe as a passenger.

The whole adventure seemed to him the glory, the enchantment, of his youth. There was an actual exaltation in the writing of the story which fifteen years later rushed from his pen in a few days. *Youth: A Narrative* is the modest title of this "bit of life" which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in September, 1898.

## NOTES

3. *Conway*. A training-ship.

*crusted*. Old, antiquated, venerable, fine; used often of wine, to indicate age and fineness of flavour.

*P. & O.* Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Line, offering service to Africa, India, Australia.

*stun'-sails*. Abbreviation for *studding-sails*. The studding-sail is a light sail set at the side of a principal square sail to increase a vessel's speed in a free wind.

4. *chronicle*. A continuous register of events in the order of time. Distinguish from *story*, which technically implies a plot.

5. *clipper*. A vessel with a sharp bow, built and rigged for fast sailing. The first ships of this type were the Baltimore clippers, famous as privateers in the early wars of the United States.

*coaster*. A vessel engaged in the coast trade.

*the Capes*. The Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn.

6. *Shadwell basin*. A basin of the Thames, directly east of London Docks.

*ballast*. Heavy material put in the hold of a ship to sink it in the water and thus give it stability.

*galley*. The cook-room, kitchen, or caboose of a ship.

7. *Yarmouth Roads*. A roadstead in the North Sea, off Norfolk, affording fairly safe anchorage.

*lee*. The side opposite to that against which the wind blows.

*Dogger Bank*. An extensive sandbank in the North Sea, between England and Denmark. It is a famous fishing ground, and probably obtained its name from the word *dogger*, Dutch for a codfish boat.

*dips*. Candles made by dipping wicks in fat or wax.

the Tyne. A river of Northern England. It is a tidal river, with very fine docks at Newcastle-on-Tyne, which is important because of the large quantity of excellent coal found in the neighbourhood.

**runners.** Commercial agents, messengers.

**8. *Sartor Resartus.*** One of the most important books of Thomas Carlyle, the great Scottish historian and philosopher. The phrase *sartor resartus* means "the tailor retailed" and is an appropriate title for a book in which Carlyle attempts to explain the meaning of life, to penetrate beneath the clothes, the conventions made by humanity through thousands of years, and so to get at the real man.

**Burnaby.** Frederick Gustavus Burnaby, English traveller and soldier. He achieved fame through crossing Russian Asia on horseback, an exciting journey which he describes in *A Ride to Khiva*. He was born in 1842 and died fighting in Egypt in 1884.

**poop.** Stern of a ship.

**10. thwart.** A rower's seat in a boat, extending from side to side.

**painter.** Rope attached to the bow of a boat for making it fast to a wharf, or stake, etc.

**11. the Lizards.** Lizard Head, or Lizard Point, the most southerly point of Great Britain, situated in Cornwall and marked by two lighthouses.

**12. stanchions.** Posts, pillars, upright supports.

**long-boat.** The largest boat carried by a merchant sailing-vessel.

**gripes.** Lashings securing a boat in its place.

**13. weather-cloth.** Canvas or tarpaulin.

**counter.** The curved part of the stern of a ship.

**14. deck-house.** Room erected on the deck.

**15. aft.** Toward the stern.

**companion.** Companion-way, staircase to cabin.

**bending.** Knotting ropes for.

**16. Falmouth.** A seaport on the southern coast of Cornwall. The estuary of the river Fal forms the roadstead, and offers the first safe harbour for ships passing up the Channel.

**topsides.** The portion of a ship on either side above the water-line hooker-one-masted fishing-smack.

**Geordie.** A collier, especially a sailing vessel.

**Bankok.** The capital of Siam, and one of the most picturesque cities in the East, because of the number of its beautifully coloured temples.

**Mesopotamia.** Loosely, the land between the two rivers, the Euphrates on the West and the Tigris on the East. It is the cradle of a very old civilization, and in it are mounds marking the sites of ancient towns still unexplored.

**17. underwriters.** Marine insurance agents.

**18. grog-blossoms.** Pimples or redness on the nose, caused by intemperance.

**hulk.** A dismantled ship, used often as a storage-vessel.

**19. Land's End.** A promontory of South-West Cornwall which forms the most westerly point of England.

**Forelands.** North and South Forelands, two capes of England projecting from the East coast of Kent. They are composed of chalk cliffs and are sixteen miles apart. Their lighthouses make them important and well-known to sailors.

**knot.** Nautical mile, 6080 feet.

**20. Java Head.** The South-West point of the island of Java, one of the larger islands of the Dutch East Indies in that portion of the Malay Archipelago known as the Sunda Islands.

**scuttle.** A small opening or hatchway in the deck, with a lid covering it. It is large enough to admit a man.

**forepeak.** The portion of the ship which is farthest forward, in the angle formed by the ship's bows.

**21. bulkhead.** Upright partition dividing ship's cabins or water-tight compartments.

**22. head-pump.** A pump at the bow supplying sea-water for washing the decks and for other sanitary purposes.

**24. davits.** A pair of cranes for suspending or lowering a ship's boat.

**hull down.** Far away, so that the hull is invisible.

**25. Chips.** Traditional nickname for the carpenter on a merchant vessel.

**27. lazarette.** Place between decks, generally near stern.

**29. fife-rail.** A railing around a mast or around the bulwarks of a quarter-deck.

**30. Calashes.** Malay seamen, so called from their head-dresses or turbans.

**31. yards.** The cylindrical spars slung across masts to support sails.

**coughed.** Variant form of *coffed* or *cuffed*, meaning fastened or knotted.

**bunts.** bunt, the bunchy roll at the centre of the yard when a square sail is furled.

**gasket.** Small cord for securing sail to yard.

**33. mizzen-shrouds.** The set of ropes attached to the head of the mizzen-mast, which is the aftermost mast of a three-masted ship.

**34. lumbered.** Loaded.

**gunwales.** Upper edge of ship's side (Pronounce *gunnels*).

**kedge-anchor.** Small anchor attached to a hawser, or large rope, which is wound in to alter the position of a ship.

**stepped.** Set up.

**36. cat-heads.** Projecting pieces of iron or timber near the bow, to which the anchors are hoisted and secured.

**top-gallant-mast.** The mast immediately above the top-mast, or second mast.

**37. Erebus.** In Greek mythology the son of Chaos. The word denotes utter darkness, and designates the place between Earth and Hades.

**38. taffrail.** Rail around stern of a vessel.

**40. jury-rig.** A sail for temporary service.

**cockle-shell.** A small shallow boat.

**42. tiller.** A steering lever of wood or metal for turning the rudder of a boat.

**pile.** A post or stake.

**flagship.** The ship with the admiral on board; in this case a humorous reference to the captain's boat.

**old man.** On merchant vessels the captain is always referred to as "the old man."

**44. Resident.** British government agent.

**46. stem-head.** The head of the curved metal or wooden piece to which the two sides of a ship are joined at the fore end.

**47. Nemesis.** Goddess of retribution; hence retributive justice.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSIONS  
OR FOR ESSAYS

1. Recount the various disasters that overtook *The Judea*.
2. Where is the climax of the story reached? Give reasons for your opinion.
3. What are the interesting features in the story of the "blowing-up"?
4. Select and discuss incidents which show most vividly the strain of the voyage.
5. Follow, with references to time and place, the movements of *The Judea* from the time she left London until she was abandoned.
6. How do the ship's name and motto dominate the story?
7. Conrad calls this narrative a *chronicle*, yet we think and speak of it as a *story*. Why?
8. Discuss the use of the comic element in *Youth*. Note where it is introduced, and suggest an explanation.
9. Select descriptive passages that seem to you particularly good, and give reasons for your choice.
10. Discuss, with exemplification, what may be called the cumulative effect in Conrad's descriptions.
11. What do you consider the most amazing picture in the story of the loss of *The Judea*?
12. Conrad declared that his task as a writer was "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*." To what extent is this aim achieved in *Youth*?
13. How is the reader made conscious of Marlow's listeners?
14. H. G. Wells told Conrad that he thought the story should have ended with the paragraph on Page 41—"And this is how I see the East——." Do you agree?



15. What purposes are served by the last paragraph of the book?

16. Select the various apostrophes to *Youth* and make comment on them.

17. Write an essay on philosophical or cynical views of life as you find them expressed in this story.

18. What ideas does Conrad express about racial differences, duty, the personality of a ship, the glamour of the East, the sense of conquest, romance, imagination?

19. What justification is there for thinking of Marlow as Conrad's imaginary self?

20. Make a character study of Captain Beard. Compare him with Marlow.

21. Discuss the various means by which Conrad gives reality to his story.

22. "What always gives his words the right shade of meaning, and at the same time an unusual relief and expressiveness, is the metaphor or the simile that accompanies all his important statements." (Gustav Morf). Apply this criticism to *Youth*.

23. Construct for yourself a "creed of the sea" from what you read here. ("The endeavour, the test, the trial of life").

24. Who are the chief figures in the portrait gallery of *Youth*? What enables you to distinguish them clearly?

25. Java, Bankok, Mesopotamia—Why does Marlow call these "blessed names, magic names"?









2022

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120 - 6

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128

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3rd day

ship burning "like a funeral pyre  
huddled in the night"  
"a significant death had come  
like a grace, like a gift, like a  
reward".

"upon a disc of sea shown  
by the blood-red. of gleam"

Cast

"perfumed like a flower, silver  
like death, dark like a sea"

Conrad - writes in triplets

walked

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boat - "walked towards us upon the sea"

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Conrad  
Youth

